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ABSTRACT

Gallaudet College provides education for preschool age through adult hearing impaired persons. Because of the lack of clear and continuous communication during their developing years, students who come to the school have not learned the English language well and have had communication problems most of their lives. To address these problems, undergraduate students must take five hours of classes in the Department of Communication Arts, including "Communication Processes and the Hearing Impaired," "Public Speaking" or "Group Discussion," and one additional course within the department curriculum. The subject matter taught in the communication processes class, coming from both speech communication and audiology, covers communication as an academic discipline, why and how people communicate, what hearing impairment is, the modes of communication used by the hearing impaired, and how communication skills relate to hearing loss and how both relate to the communication process. The public speaking course includes a traditional emphasis on skill development in researching and recording speech material, outlining and organizing information, using appropriate style, acquiring confidence and effectiveness in delivery, and listening actively and critically. The group discussion course shares these objectives but focuses on problem-solving discussions and public discussion. Though the communication courses at Gallaudet emphasize the needs of the hearing impaired, they share many of the same goals and characteristics of similar courses at other schools. (SRT)

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THE BASIC COMMUNICATION COURSE IN A COLLEGE FOR THE HEARING IMPAIRED

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THE BASIC COMMUNICATION COURSE IN A COLLEGE FOR THE HEARING IMPAIRED

The basic course in communication at Gallaudet College shares similar goals with equivalent courses elsewhere, yet the design and objectives of this basic course require special considerations. Communication is the reason Gallaudet College exists: if hearing impairment did not cause a communication handicap, there would be no need for special education for hearing impaired persons. This paper will first establish the context of the basic course by describing the College, the student population and the evolution of the basic course. Following this background information, the goals and procedures of the basic course will be outlined. Finally, issues and directions for the future will be presented.

Gallaudet College

The Gallaudet College campus provides educational resources for hearing impaired persons from preschool age through adulthood. Kendall Demonstration Elementary School (and preschool) serves the District of Columbia and metropolitan area; the Model Secondary School for the Deaf serves a five state area; the collegiate programs are international in scope, and the continuing education program has regional centers to serve hearing impaired persons nationwide. Gallaudet accepts the responsibility of reaching out to meet the educational needs of hearing impaired people across the nation and of informing the general public about hearing impairment.

The collegiate academic departments are organized into four schools: The School of Preparatory Studies which provides a remedial course of study emphasizing reading, writing and mathematics; the College of Arts and Sciences; the School of Education and Human Services; and the School of Communication, which houses the departments of Audiology, Communication Arts, Linguistics and Interpreter Training, Sign Communication, Television Film and Photography, and Theatre Arts. The undergraduate program has a liberal arts curriculum and admits hearing impaired students to work toward a baccalaureate degree. The graduate programs are service oriented and accept both hearing impaired and normally hearing students studying for careers in which they will work with hearing impaired persons.

The importance of communication is reflected throughout the College. First, the By-Laws of the Collegiate Faculty contain a communication policy:

> The Collegiate Faculty recognizes that the faculty and student body are comprised of persons who depend on a variety of communication modes and that a major purpose of instruction is the communication of ideas. To facilitate such communication, the faculty is expected to use the "simultaneous method" [a blending of speech and/or lip movements with signs from American Sign Language] in the classroom. This method also serves as the primary communication method in faculty meetings and meetings of like nature. The Faculty also

> recognizes that American Sign Language (ASL, Ameslan) is a language used by many of our students. As such, ASL may be used as a supplemental teaching tool where its use will enhance instruction. Where required by course objectives, methods other than the "simultaneous method" may be used.

Second, faculty members are evaluated on competency in the use of the Simultaneous Method and must be judged satisfactory in order to receive promotions, merit increases or tenure. Third, the School of Communication was established to focus attention on Gallaudet's committment to communication as a priority. Finally, the Collegiate Faculty has established undergraduate curriculum goals with clarifying objectives which testify to belief in the importance of communication in the lives of college graduates. And, within the Department of Communication Arts in the School of Communication, all students are required to take courses which guide them toward achieving these curriculum goals.

The Gallaudet College Undergraduate Student

In a world which relies heavily on speech and hearing for communication, the hearing impaired person's ability to participate depends on several factors: degree and type of hearing impairment; ability to understand words auditorily; age of onset of the impairment, and communication experiences and training. Lack of clear and continuous communication in the early years has a seemingly irreversible impact on the learning of the English language. Parents with normal hearing who introduce visual language help (i.e. sign, fingerspelling, cued speech, print and/or pictures) do not usually do so until after a diagnosis of hearing impairment is made and -- more importantly -- accepted. The very important early development years have passed.

The undergraduate students come to Gallaudet having experienced varying communication frustrations for most of their lives: many students have never been able to communicate easily with members of their family. A substantial number of students realize that many or most people will not be able to understand them well enough to converse and that their English language skills are inferior to those of the normal population with equal intelligence. Many students do not want to use their speech and many support the use of the American Sign Language (ASL) even to the exclusion of English. Students who do show evidence of speech and/or English language ability are often relegated to the group of "outsiders" on campus. In addition to being very important at Gallaudet College, communication is a very sensitive issue.

Evolution of the Basic Course

In the 1950's, Gallaudet College instituted a communication requirement in the Department of Audiology for all students for all five years (including the prep year) they were matriculated. This requirement was an oral/auditory communication skill requirement; concentration was on lipreading, speech and auditory

training. The Department of Audiology scheduled students for therapy according to their needs as assessed by speech, lipreading and hearing evaluations.

The intervening thirty years witnessed an evolving communication requirement as faculty perception of student needs changed. One year of therapy was replaced by a year of learning about deafness and a second year replaced by a year of public speaking in the Simultaneous Method. Elective courses encompassing the broad spectrum of communication were gradually added to the curriculum. The Department of Audiology became the Department of Audiology and Speech and is now two separate departments: the Department of Audiology and the Department of Communication Arts. The Department of Audiology continues to assess the hearing and the oral communication skills of the incoming undergraduate students and to provide therapy for students who so elect. The Department of Communication Arts offers a speech communication curriculum.

Currently, undergraduate students are required to take five credit hours in the Department of Communication Arts. The required course sequence is as follows:

Communication Processes and the Hearing Impaired
(One semester: two credit hours)

Public Speaking OR Group Discussion
(One semester: two credit hours)

One additional course in communication.

The combination of the first two courses listed is considered the 'Basic Course' in communication.

Communication Processes and the Hearing Impaired

Communication Processes and the Hearing Impaired is the first course in the basic course sequence. The course content incorporates some basic knowledge from two disciplines: speech communication and audiology. The basic text, Communication Processes and the Hearing Impaired, was written especially for the course and is supplemented by other texts and/or outside readings in speech communication. The course is divided into five interrelated topics: communication as an academic discipline; why and how people communicate; what hearing impairment is; the modes of communication used by hearing impaired persons; how communication skills relate to hearing loss and how both relate to the communication process.

The broad objectives for the course relate to the five interrelated topics and can be stated as follows:

*** Students will become aware of communication as an academic discipline;

*** Students will understand communication as a dynamic process;

*** Students will be able to explain the function of the hearing mechanism, differentiate among

different types of hearing loss, and interpret basic information on a hearing evaluation form;

*** Students will be able to differentiate among the various languages and modes used by hearing impaired people;

*** Students will have a realistic appraisal of their own communication skills and be able to relate that to hearing loss;

*** Students will be able to discuss the relationship of communication skills and hearing loss to the communication process.

Satisfaction of the above objectives should increase students' appreciation for individual differences relative to hearing loss and communication and should encourage a change in their attitudes toward people who choose to use different communication modes.

In the first part of the course, the development of the communication discipline is traced from the Classical Period to the present. The curriculum of the Department of Communication Arts at Gallaudet is explained relative to other colleges and universities. Basic definitions are discussed and areas of communication study are defined.

Gallaudet students tend to equate the study of communication with speech therapy or with learning to sign and/or learning ASL (American Sign Language). Faculty in the department are still often referred to as "my speech (sign at lips) teacher." This introductory part of the course guides the students toward broadening their understanding of communication.

The second topic in the course focuses on the process of communication as it occurs in the general population. Hearing impairment as a factor in the communication process is de-emphasized. Students are asked to look at why people communicate and to use a communication model to evaluate the effectiveness of communication interactions/transactions. Basic speech communication topics are covered; perception, non-verbal communication and verbal communication. Although hearing impairment is not emphasized in this second unit, these topics do require some discussion of how they are affected by hearing impairment and the use of visual modes of communication.

Many Gallaudet students express the opinion that communication breaks down only when the other person does not sign or does not use ASL: parent-student communication would have no problems if the parents could sign. This unit in the course asks students to look further than the mode of communication to assess the effectiveness of the transaction.

The study of hearing impairment is the third part of the first basic course. The topics covered are as follows:

*** Anatomy and physiology of hearing
*** Causes of hearing impairment
*** Types of hearing impairment

*** Sound and the audiogram
*** Testing hearing
*** Interpreting hearing test results

The focus of discussions of the above information is on the individual students: their etiology, type and degree of hearing loss; and, their interpretation of their own hearing test results.

The general public seems to believe that anyone who has had any amount of contact with Gallaudet is an expert on all things related to hearing impairment. Unfortunately, those "experts" often do nothing to dispel the notion of expertise. This third course topic does not make the students into experts on the topic of hearing loss; but, hopefully the student will be informed sufficiently so as not to disseminate wrong information.

Communication modes and languages used by hearing impaired persons in the United States is the fourth topic of the course. Students come to Gallaudet College using a variety of communication modes: speech, fingerspelling, lipreading, audition, signing, manually coded English systems, and cued speech used in multiple combinations. Students also enter Gallaudet with varying skills in the use of English and American Sign Language. Many use a combination of the two languages which is called Pidgin Sign English (PSE).

The basic structure of American Sign Language (ASL) is studied as compared with English. Many students have little appreciation for ASL as a language: some think that ASL is any signing without using speech; some say that ASL is "poor English" or a "shorthand language." Misconceptions about American Sign Language, English and PSE are discussed and clarified. Students are asked to relate their choice of language and communication mode to specific communication situations and are encouraged to be sensitive to changing needs for effective communication.

The relationship of communication skills to hearing impairment introduces the last part of this course. Students receive the results of evaluations in lipreading, speech and receptive ability in the Simultaneous Method and in ASL. The classes discuss the many factors which contribute to the development of these communication skills and which skills they might expect realistically to improve.

The student should now understand hearing impairment and how their hearing impairment has affected the way they choose to communicate with different people in different situations. The communication process is reviewed, this time with an emphasis on hearing impairment as a factor.

Communication Processes and the Hearing Impaired exposes students to information which the collegiate faculty has decided all students should know. Most students are eager to discuss hearing loss and its effect on communication. They appreciate learning what their audiograms mean. Students usually seem comfortable discussing their beliefs and values relative to communication. Whether the students appreciate the broadened concept of communication as presented in this course, and whether students

begin to modify their attitudes toward those who have different beliefs and values relative to communication, is not known.

One problem the department faces with this first basic course is that freshmen taking the course are often enrolled in remedial English classes. These students have great difficulty understanding the textbook and required outside readings and have difficulty writing answers to test questions. Added to this is the fact that the course is required and students do not like required courses. As a result, not all faculty are eager to teach this course.

In addition, some faculty do not feel comfortable teaching all of the course content. The subject matter requires knowledge of audiology and speech communication, and knowledge of the educational and sociological aspects of hearing impairment is useful. Because faculty members do not feel qualified to teach all of the subject matter, the course is often divided: seven weeks with a speech communication instructor and seven weeks with an instructor in audiology/special education. The division destroys the sense of unity which was envisioned when the course was developed: the course becomes two short courses.

Following the two-credit Communication Processes course, students have a choice between Group Discussion or Public Speaking. Because both courses deal with gathering, evaluating, organizing and presenting information, they serve a similar purpose in terms of the general education objectives of the undergraduate curriculum. Given the special needs of the Gallaudet population in understanding and interpreting written information, these courses may be even more important here than at a hearing college.

Public Speaking

The objectives of the Public Speaking course include a traditional emphasis on skill development in researching and recording speech material, outlining and organizing information, using appropriate style, acquiring confidence and effectiveness in delivery, and listening actively and critically. In addition, the course addresses some special needs and objectives appropriate to Gallaudet students. Among these are reinforcing English skills, increasing tolerance of communication differences and adaptability to different communication situations, and developing skill in the Simultaneous Method of communication.

The Simultaneous Method entails a combination of languages and modes of communication: speaking or mouthing English and simultaneously encoding signs from American Sign Language following English word order. The resultant linguistic hybrid is termed Pidgin Sign English or PSE. By Gallaudet policy, the Simultaneous Method is the standard mode of instruction at the College, for it is designed to be understood by the full spectrum of the campus population.

Because students in public speaking classes generally reflect a broad range of backgrounds and communication preferences, there is ample need for a communication mode that can be understood by all. However, many people find it difficult to both speak and

sign at the same time. Complaints (from both hearing and deaf students), such as "Do I have to use my voice?" provide openings for discussions about communication preferences and modes, the encoding and decoding process, and ethical responsibilities of speaker and audience. Hopefully, these discussions and the necessity of being understood by all their peers in the classroom help prod students into expanding their communication options and broadening their concepts of effective communication.

As a two-credit course, Public Speaking classes meet twice weekly. During the semester students present at least four extemporaneous speeches, including an autobiographical, demonstration, informative and special occasion speech. In addition there are impromptu speaking assignments. All instructors currently use the Verdeber text, Effective Public Speaking. A textbook (Sign-Talk: Public Communication for the Hearing Impaired by Jayne Lytle) was specially written for hearing impaired college students but is not currently in use.

Videotape is widely employed as an instructional tool. At least two speeches are taped for each student and self-evaluation based on the tapes is required. Several professors have produced tapes of model speeches, derived from classroom presentations. These, along with videotapes of other public speaking events, also serve as subjects for student critiques. Students are encouraged to use a videotape practice room at the College Learning Center where (with the help of a classmate-coach) they can record, review and revise their speeches prior to classroom presentation.

The communication preferences, skills and needs of Gallaudet students both underscore the importance of the Public Speaking course and pose problems in conducting it. Regarding writing skills, for example, it is not unusual for students to claim no prior experience with outlining. Similarly, the use of a newspaper or magazine index often seems to be a novel experience for many of the freshmen and sophomores in Public Speaking classes. In fact, basic outlining and library research skills are taught in the College's English Language Program. What is surprising is that many students seem to have received no practice in these areas as part of their high school education. Perhaps a chief rationale for maintaining a Public Speaking requirement is that the course serves to reinforce the need for and practice of these important basic skills. Now that the College has embarked on a Writing Across the Curriculum program, the reinforcement of such skills in a variety of academic contexts offers hope for general improvement.

As previously mentioned, the use of the Simultaneous Method is viewed by some as necessary and by others as problematic. Some advocates of deaf culture argue that public speaking classes at Gallaudet should be conducted in ASL since this is the language through which leaders of the deaf community address their deaf constituents. Others point out that only about half of entering Gallaudet students are fluent in ASL and that PSE (the Simultaneous Method) communicates with a broader audience.

A possible option for consideration in Public Speaking classes is an assignment in which students create their own rhetorical situation and audience, set the scene for the class and then deliver an address designed for and in a mode appropriate to the

situation. Since most Public Speaking sections include a handful of (hearing) interpreting students, such an assignment would give these students an opportunity to practice their interpreting skills in cases where the Simultaneous Method were not used.

The presence of interpreting students in Public Speaking classes exemplifies the diversity of student needs and skills represented in a typical general education course at Gallaudet. This diversity challenges instructors and serves neither very weak nor very strong students well when the only instructional recourse is to "teach to the middle." At the same time, this very diversity can enliven a communication course, particularly when the major question being addressed is "how can we better understand one another?"

Casual observation and experience suggest that since students have been given the option of either Group Discussion or Public Speaking, those in the latter course tend to be more motivated and enthusiastic learners than previously was the case. Unfortunately, the self-selection process that seems to be operating also indicates that many students who are not motivated to study public communication choose Group Discussion as the 'lesser of two evils.'

Group Discussion

The Group Discussion course shares with Public Speaking the same general objectives regarding the gathering, evaluation, organization and presentation of information. Likewise, these classes are conducted in the Simultaneous Method, help to reinforce written English skills and reduce communication barriers between students. Specifically, this course focuses on problem-solving discussions and public (panel, forum, symposium) discussions.

Most instructors use as a required text Brilhart's Effective Group Discussion but are less satisfied with it than the Verdeber book for Public Speaking. Typically, the focus for about half of the semester is on problem-solving. Simulations are frequently used to teach rational problem solving procedures, and a particular simulation,developed at Gallaudet specifically for use in these classes, has proven to be an effective instructional tool. Videotaping of discussions is conducted to varying degrees by different instructors. All recognize the importance of videotaping as a teaching tool but bemoan the technical difficulties involved. The two-credit-hour limit is also seen as a problem with this course, which ideally would meet twice weekly for one-and-one-half hour classes, allowing time for both group activities and instructional lectures/discussions at each session.

Because different communication preferences and backgrounds tend to limit the associations students form outside of class, the group discussion context often thrusts together individuals who would not otherwise affiliate with each other. The necessity for teamwork in achieving an interdependent goal motivates students to overcome attitudinal barriers, resolve tensions and communicate clearly. Success in doing so requires attentiveness and sensitivity from the instructor, who must act as a group

facilitator. An important result is a greater openness among students toward one another.

Despite the resistance they might have toward a required course in Group Discussion or Public Speaking, students usually appreciate the practical benefits of learning public communication skills. For many students, a major attraction of Gallaudet College is the opportunity to participate fully and equally in the extracurricular activities on campus. Those who have been in the minority at a hearing high school may find that for the first time they can communicate on an equal footing with their peers and attain positions of leadership in clubs, committees, and organizations. The relevance of the skills learned in communication courses to success in these organizations can be a real source of motivation and helps account for the surprising popularity of another Communication Arts course: Parliamentary Procedure.

Conclusions

One broad conclusion to be drawn from the experience at Gallaudet College is that the basic communication course at a special institution like Gallaudet shares many of the same goals and characteristics of similar courses at other schools. For example, the course includes an introduction to the communication process and to the study of communication as an academic discipline, emphasizes the development of public communication performance skills, and reinforces language, writing and critical listening skills.

However, the special needs of hearing impaired students result in some unique emphases within Gallaudet's basic course. The inclusion of modules on hearing impairment and on the communication modes used by hearing impaired people represents one way in which Gallaudet's basic course is different. Secondly, the course provides a forum in which students can confront their attitudes about communication and work toward more flexibility in interacting in various situations. While the goal of increasing communication options is probably an aspect of the basic course at most institutions, the limitations which hearing impairment can put on communication make this objective particularly salient at Gallaudet. Similarly, the reinforcement of writing skills may be a tangential benefit of most basic courses in communication, but at Gallaudet it is an especially important element of the course and of the general education curriculum as a whole.

The basic course in communication has been through several metamorphoses during its evolution at Gallaudet College, changing from a non-credit therapy requirement to a five-credit-hour course sequence. The *raison d'etre* of the requirement is now supported by three of the broad goals of the general education curriculum, which call for (1) "programs to develop awareness and understanding of, sensitivity to, and skills in the languages and various communication modes used and needed by hearing impaired individuals;" (2) "knowledge of physiological . . . aspects of deafness;" and (3) "an integrated college-wide program to help students achieve reading and writing skills in the

English language needed to succeed in college, career and social settings."

The basic course at Gallaudet College will continue to evolve. In response to some of the problems cited above as well as to a nation-wide emphasis on academic assessment, the Department of Communication Arts is initiating an assessment of its curriculum, including the basic course sequence. Depending on the results of the assessment, some of the following modifications can be anticipated:

*** possible reorganization of the material in the two 'halves' of the course;

*** a major revision of the textbook used in Communication Processes classes;

*** exploration of the use of media and alternative classrooms and the facilitation of videotape usage;

*** faculty development training to allow more faculty to feel comfortable with teaching the course in its entirety;

*** and the use of alumni whose career experience reflects the importance and application of communication skills as guest lecturers.